

March 10, 1999

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The Honorable William E. Kennard
Chairman,
Federal Communications Commission
The Portals
455 Twelfth Street S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of Secretary

Dear Chairman Kennard:

We are writing to commend the Commission for taking action on an issue of great importance to us—improving access to our airwaves for our local communities. We have become increasingly concerned about the growing concentration of the media in our country and are pleased that the Commission is taking action to increase opportunities for local communities to use our radio airwaves.

One of the fundamental tenets of our democracy is to ensure that diverse interests have opportunities to express themselves at different levels, and that they are not locked out in a monopolistic, globalized fashion. It is as fundamental as free speech. Radio is perhaps the most qualified of any media outlet to provide community access. It is a relatively inexpensive medium to produce and is well-suited to cover community issues and local music. Unfortunately, today's radio is the most concentrated and formulaic medium in the country. Providing licenses to low power FM radio stations would create new opportunities for local voices to be heard in their communities.

Allowing low power FM radio stations on the air would empower local broadcasters to serve their communities with a variety of new voices and services. Low power radio stations would be able to address specific groups—including minority groups, the religious community, and linguistic minorities—and provide a forum for debate about important local issues. These kinds of stations would strengthen community identity in urban neighborhoods, rural towns and other communities which are currently too small to win attention from "mainstream", ratings-driven media.

Further, they would provide an outlet for the diverse, local voices and musicians that are presently priced out of the market. These stations would also provide advertising options for local businesses and increased employment opportunities in these communities.

The strong interest in independent radio stations shows that the creation of low power radio service would have wide support. The tremendous public demand for microradio is demonstrated by the proliferation of illegal radio stations, whose operators broadcast at the risk of financial losses and, in some cases, imprisonment.

Again, we applaud the Commission's willingness to address this issue. We are hopeful that the creation of a new class of low power FM radio service will soon become a reality. We look forward to working on making the airwaves more accessible to our local communities.

Sincerely,

Representative David E. Bonior, Democrat of Michigan
Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Republican of Florida
Representative Rosa DeLauro, Democrat of Connecticut
Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard, Democrat of California
Representative James E. Clyburn, Democrat of South Carolina

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